

Michael F. Easley  
Governor



State of North Carolina  
Office of the Governor

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**GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES ASSISTANCE FOR WESTERN BUSINESSES  
*ASSEMBLES TASK FORCE TO ASSESS ADDITIONAL NEEDS***

**RALEIGH** - Gov. Mike Easley today announced expanded assistance for western North Carolina businesses through the Small Business Technology and Development Center (SBTDC). At Easley's direction, the SBTDC is increasing staff in its western offices in Asheville and Cullowhee to assist small businesses applying for federal disaster assistance through the Small Business Administration (SBA). Easley also asked the SBA to extend the deadline for applications for assistance for 60 days beyond the current Nov. 9 (Frances) and Nov. 17 (Ivan) deadlines to Jan. 8 and Jan. 16 respectively.

"Thirty-two western counties have been designated federal disaster areas," said Easley. "The businesses here need our help through this recovery phase. The SBTDC will be a valuable resource to ensure that federal disaster assistance is maximized and recommend additional steps the state can take to get us back to normal."

SBTDC staff will perform outreach to businesses affected by the storm and will guide them through the federal disaster assistance procedures. They will provide assistance on determining what aid is available through the SBA and will help to complete the necessary paperwork.

In addition, Easley announced that he is naming a task force of local officials, business leaders, non-profit organizations and economic developers to evaluate the needs of the western region of the state and make recommendations on strategies for recovery. The Western Recovery Task Force will hold its first meeting within the next two weeks and is expected to provide a full report to Gov. Easley and the legislature in December.

"The west has suffered some of the most severe flooding since the 1970s and we are going to help these families, businesses and communities recover quickly," said Easley. "It is important that any task force include those who know the community best. Only then can we design a plan that meets the real needs of our people."

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